

LD2219

A3

1868

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5

A3
1868

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

HAVERFORD COLLEGE,

BEFORE THE

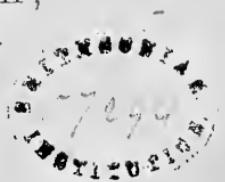
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION,

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 24, 1868,

BY

L L O Y D P. S M I T H,

LIBRARIAN OF THE PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY.


TENNYSON.

Yet I doubt not through the ages one unceasing purpose runs;
And the thoughts of men are widened by the process of the suns.



PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1869.

ADDRESS.

PROFESSORS OF HAVERFORD COLLEGE, FELLOW GRADUATES,
AND FRIENDS:

It is now just thirty-one years since the Class of which it was my lot to be a member was graduated from yonder now time-honored walls.

The first thought which arises in the minds of all of us—old Haverford scholars—when we revisit these academic shades, has reference to the changes wrought by Time since we were students here. It would be natural that I should speak to you of the changes in the Institution itself, in my contemporaries here, in our beloved country, in the world. But these themes have been so often and so well treated by those who have preceded me at these yearly gatherings of the Alumni, that I shall not touch upon them, but shall ask your attention for a brief period to changes of another kind, and such as are, perhaps, not unsuitable for discussion by those whose privilege it is to have enjoyed a liberal education. I speak of the remarkable advance in human knowledge which has taken place since we bade adieu to Alma Mater. Time would not permit (even if I had the ability) to take up the various sciences in order and to recall the progress which has been made in each since 1837. The points rather to which I shall invite your attention are the general tendency of modern science, and the analogy which exists between the history of the universe as thereby disclosed, and that of literature—the one being the expression of the thought of the Creator, and the other that of His creature, Man. If it shall appear that there is any resemblance between the two, it will but add one more to the analogies and the harmonies which pervade Creation.

If we take a cursory glance at those branches of knowledge

which have to do with the material universe, we shall find that the grand discoveries made in our time all tend in one direction, viz.: to prove that the laws which govern the Creation are the laws of **CONTINUITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS.**

Take Astronomy, for example. By the use of that wonderful method, the spectrum analysis, the light coming from the sun and the stars has been made to reveal the elements of which those bodies are composed; so that it is no exaggeration to say that the past ten years have taught us more of the physical constitution of the universe than was found out in all previous ages put together. We now know not only that the sun is an intensely heated solid or liquid body enveloped in the flames of burning gases, but that iron, calcium (the base of lime), magnesium, sodium, chromium, and other elements of our earth, are present in the solar atmosphere. The fixed stars, by the use of the spectroscope, exhibit bright and dark lines across the spectrum, many of which are the same as those brought out by the simple substances which make up this planet; those lines indicate the presence, among other elements, of hydrogen (one of the constituents of water), sodium (the base of common salt), magnesium and iron. But the farther we penetrate into space, the more unlike to those we are acquainted with become the objects of our examination. When we proceed to the appearances of the more distant nebulae, we get but one or two known lines, and we are met by one or two new bands not yet identified with any produced by substances on this globe. Moreover, it is made certain that the brightest at least of the so-called fixed stars are, like our sun, burning bodies, surrounded with gaseous flames; so that whatever life exists in the universe is probably confined to their satellites and to the planets of our own system. Finally, recent astronomical discoveries have proved that some at least of what are called fixed stars have an independent motion of their own. Sirius, for example, the brightest of them, travels at the rate of a thousand million miles a year. The constellations scattered apparently at random over the vault of heaven will probably be forced sooner or later to give up their secrets, and the time may come when we shall discover the laws of organization which bind them into a system.

Look, how the floor of heaven—
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold ;
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim ;
Such harmony is in immortal souls ;
But, while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

We cannot indeed hear the music of the spheres with our bodily ears, but in these most interesting discoveries our minds discern the divine laws of harmonious, continuous life, obtaining on the most august scale possible to our comprehension. It is perhaps too soon to assert that the changes now going on among the stars mean progress, but the analogy of nature makes it probable that development characterizes the entire universe. Meantime, the mere discovery of hydrogen in the fixed stars—nitrogen being present in the nebulae—proves the substantial unity and continuity of Creation.

This continuous unity in variety is even more strikingly exhibited in our solar system. The clouds, snows, continents and seas of Mars make it almost certain that that planet is inhabited, though the conditions of life are slightly modified as compared with those on our earth. As we proceed in imagination toward the more remote planets of our system, those conditions are gradually changed ; and corresponding modifications in the living beings who may inhabit our fellow-satellites must be taken for granted. Among the innumerable combinations of matter and incarnations of force which are going on within the bounds of the universe, we know those only which are confined to our little globe, but it may be that there are forms of existence as far transcending humanity as humanity itself transcends the sea-weed. However this may be, modern science proves that our sun and its attendant planets form one system, the subordinate parts of which are in vital connection with one another and with their progenitor, the Sun. The nebular hypothesis of Laplace which has recently received some valuable corrections and modifications from Piancini, finds more and more acceptance with men of science ; and it is universally felt that this theory, or some other analogous to it, must be received as explaining the past history of our solar system.

Indeed, an analysis of the light from the nebulae has pretty nearly demonstrated the truth of Laplace's and Herschel's theory, and has made it almost certain that the condensation of gaseous matter into suns with their attendant planets is even now going on in the regions of space. Here again we have a magnificent example of the known universal law of continuity, and of the probably universal law of progress from the simple to the complex.

Narrowing our gaze to the little ball on which we live, we find that, following the lead of Sir Charles Lyell, nearly all whose studies warrant them in expressing an opinion on the subject are agreed in holding that the present state of our globe, as far as we can penetrate its surface, is to be accounted for by the action of the same forces which we see at work to day; forces which have been operating gradually and continuously—without haste, but without rest—in the past. According to this theory, geological revolutions are the regular and necessary effects of great and general causes, rather than the result of a series of convulsions and catastrophes, regulated by no laws and reducible to no fixed principles—the changes of climate on the earth's surface, for example, as evidenced by geological phenomena, being founded on the changes of eccentricity in the earth's orbit. Here we find that the law of continuity and gradual change is sufficient to account for all the appearances presented by inorganic nature.

But this is not all. Geologists with one voice bear witness to the continued development and progress of organic life on the surface of our planet, from the earliest period to the present day. Various theories have been proposed, from that of Lamarck of the action of circumstances to that of Darwin of the survival of the fittest, to account for this continuous advance. None of these theories, however true, seems sufficient to explain all the facts. But the reality of Progress is unquestionable, and, under whatever law it has proceeded, we may be well assured that it has not taken place by chance, but by the unceasing action of a superintending Providence. He in whom we ourselves live and move and have our being has directed the movement in conformity with His own wise plans, and toward a definite end of which we are now permitted to have some glimpses.

We see that during the inconceivable ages of the past all things

have tended to prepare the way for the coming of Man. To my thinking, the discoveries of the last thirty years are in no respect more startling than in the light which they shed upon the primeval history of our race. I well recollect the impression produced on my mind in 1849 by the perusal of Boucher de Perthes' *Antiquités Celtes et Antediluvien*nes, then just published; and I have lived to see the incredulity with which that work was received by the learned give place to a unanimous acceptance of the amazing facts which he was the first to give to the world. To-day it is established that the original inhabitants of Europe were cannibals, waging a precarious warfare with the cave-lion, the cave-bear, the hyena, and the rhinoceros. Possessed of stone weapons only, and destitute of flocks and herds, they were savages, probably not unlike the most barbarous tribes of our North American Indians. The discovery, recently described by Professor Whitney, of a fossil skull in California at the depth of one hundred and thirty feet, in a bed which was deposited when the volcanoes of the Sierra Nevada were still in vigorous action, previous to the glacial epoch of those mountains and before the period of the mastodon and elephant, seems to show that the antiquity of man is as great in the New World as in the Old. It is evident that the infancy of our race, which in some parts of the globe is not yet finished, was prolonged through an immense period of time. The apparition of man was far anterior to the historic age; he was present at climatic and geological revolutions which preceded the present condition of our globe. Among the few human skulls found in the oldest deposits, some have been recovered which are almost bestial in their shape—less developed indeed than those of the present natives of Australia.

These discoveries have raised a curious question. Were those rude savages whose chipped flint instruments have been dug up in various parts of Europe the ancestors of the present Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians? Where was then the civilized and civilizing Caucasian? The use of metals, an early step in civilization, was evidently unknown to the men of the drift period, and the knowledge of bronze and iron as evidently at length came from the East, whose people, long after the disappearance of the now extinct mammalia, advancing

toward the West, gradually drove its savages into the corners of Europe. As regards the Mongols and the Negroes, there is nothing to indicate that the lands they now inhabit were ever tenanted by other peoples: but as regards the Aryans or true white men, there is abundant evidence that they were originally one clan or family in the south of Asia; that they emigrated thence; that they encountered and subdued tribes of a darker skin in the lands to which they wandered; and further, that while they have ever since been spreading, their civilization has been constantly increasing. What ground is there for supposing that while one branch of this family went the ways we know they did and became at last what they are, another branch poured into Central Asia and became men of the Mongolian type, while a third went into Africa and became Negroes? In other words, what is there to show that while one branch of the Aryan race became the subject of never-ceasing improvement, another has suffered never-ceasing degradation? Such a theory is absolutely without foundation. No tradition even remains of an antique people from whose degeneracy resulted the yellow and black skinned races of men; the evidence of science is that the earth was already overspread with the inferior races when the Aryan appeared. The "dark complexion, flat nose and small eyes" attributed some forty centuries ago in the oldest hymns of the Rig-Veda to the godless Dasyas, are still visible in their descendants, the naked savages known as the Santhals, who linger in the woods and mountains of Bengal. Moreover, and this is important, the tendency of the Caucasian family (in which I include the Semitic race) is to conquer and extinguish—to supplant the other families of man, as in the case of our North American Indians. This tendency has always shown itself in history, until to-day it may be said that the white man rules the world; mind ever tending to subdue matter. Here again we have in the various gradations in human races—from those which are but little above the brute up to those which are but little below the angel, and which tend to survive the others—another instance of that progress which seems to characterize the universe.

Restricting our gaze once more to the great Aryan family, that white race to which it is our privilege to belong—

a privilege bringing with it its peculiar duties, the due performance of which we shall have to answer for—we shall find, I think, that the same law obtains. Of the character, religion and manners of the Aryan race in its original seat at the foot of the Hindoo-Koosh Mountains, but little until recently was known. The researches of Sanskrit scholars, however, have brought to light certain facts which prove the Aryans to have been from the first a noble breed of men, possessed of a brain of enormous capacity as compared with that of the tribes around them. It was they who tamed the animals of the forest, who cultivated wild plants into the varieties useful to man, discovered the means of extracting metals from their ores, and invented machinery. As the geologist is justified in inferring the cannibalism of the men of the drift period from the discovery of human bones split to extract the marrow, so the philologist, who finds that the word, which in Sanskrit corresponds to our word daughter, *θυγάτηρ*, means *milker* or *milkmaid*, and that father in Sanskrit is synonymous with *pastor*, is justified in inferring that at the time when some of their commonest and most necessary words were coined the Aryan race owned herds of cattle and used them for domestic purposes—a manifest commencement of civilization. Their religion was the worship of the sun and the storm, the natural religion of observing minds destitute of the light of revelation; and out of this primitive faith have grown all the uninspired theologies of civilized man. Back, however, of their worship of the radiant orbs of heaven, of the sacred aether, the central thought of the Aryan family of man is the belief that God is in the world and the world in God. The idolatry into which the race in the lapse of time and through intercourse with inferior types fell, is a perversion and a degradation. For while man himself progresses, the natural tendency of all religions is to decline from spirituality to formalism; like rivers flowing from a clear spring, they lose in purity what they gain in volume. This was eminently the case with the religion of the Vedas. It needed the purifying influence of a monotheistic race, and the revelations made from time to time to prophets, martyrs and reformers—above all, the teachings of our Lord—before it issued in the wholesome, life-giving stream of Christianity.

Conquering its way, at a very early period, a branch of the splendid race of men whose career I strive to trace, occupied Egypt, their conquest of the dark-skinned natives being noted in the Egyptian annals as the commencement of the dynasties of the gods. Here their genius developed itself in the direction of religion, architecture, and various arts and sciences, including the invention of hieroglyphical writing. In Phoenicia, it took the course of commerce, navigation and the invention of alphabetical writing. In adopting Gobineau's theory that the Semites and Copts were the first offshoots of the Aryan stock, I am aware that it is an hypothesis only; the argument for progress would be unaffected by assigning to the ruling caste of Egypt, to the Hebrews, the Phoenicians, the Berbers and the Arabs, a separate origin as the flower of the dark-skinned autochthons of the Levant. To the Jews, who were, possibly, a branch of the same Aryan race (the Egyptian tongue being a link between the Indo-Germanic and Semitic languages)—to the Hebrews were committed the oracles of God. To them was revealed the unity of God—"Hear! O Israel, Jehovah thy God, Jehovah One"—to a full apprehension of which truth, however, they attained only by degrees. It was still a long time before they, and through them the other races of men, were vouchsafed the revelation of "Him in whom was life; and the life was the light of men." For "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"—whose name be blessed for evermore! Thus even in theology there is a progressive as well as a permanent element, and the anthropomorphism of Moses must be interpreted by the spirituality of David and the universality of Paul.

Another branch of the same white or Aryan race settled in Greece; and there was the commencement of literature and the fine arts properly so called. Bunsen calls the Greeks "that nation of Aryan antiquity which was the most humane, the most instinct with the divine element, and which has exercised the most powerful agency in moulding the actual world." In their twin prophets, Homer and Hesiod, and especially the latter, we find, for perhaps the first time, the grand idea of Progress, the belief in a beneficent Power which disposes of the affairs of men.

In Rome originated Civil and Municipal Law, wonderful pro-

ducts of the human mind, to which we are mainly indebted for our own system of jurisprudence.

Still pushing westward, along the coast of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean formed a barrier which, in the Middle Ages, could not be passed. Hence that returning wave to the Levant which we call the Crusades. Up to this time civilization may be said to have been limited to the basin of the Mediterranean Sea, around whose borders it coursed for three thousand years. At last the fulness of time arrived, and from the western extremity of the Mediterranean proceeded the expedition of Columbus, destined to discover this New World. Then followed the rise of England as a great and colonizing nation, endowed with daring and persistent energy; and the seat of civilization was transferred from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, around whose shores are situated the Great Powers which to-day march in the van of progress. The time will come, in the westward course of empire, when the Pacific Ocean will play the part now allotted to the Atlantic; its borders will be the seat of that civilization of the future of which all other civilizations have been but the forerunners. In the world that is to be, America will occupy the position held in the ancient world by Italy, having on each side oceans, but oceans as much larger than the Mediterranean Sea as the destiny of America is grander than was that of Rome.

The striking fact in all this wonderful career is, that while in the various ways in which the genius of the bearded man developed itself, there was that continuity which consisted in the possession of a language essentially the same, common traditions, the knowledge of agriculture, and the use of the metals—in a word, that while the Caucasian race, whether in Babylon, Egypt, Phœnicia, Greece, Rome, England, or the United States, possessed a civilization radically the same—there was also progress from the simple to the complex! That progress is shown in the acquisition of astronomical knowledge in Egypt, the invention of letters in Phœnicia, the creation of a literature in Greece, the development of the science of government in Rome, the establishment of *Habeas Corpus* and the trial by jury in England (the securities of individual freedom), and finally in that inventive, mechanical genius, and that capacity for voluntary organization which constitute the

distinguishing features of the American mind. What new development is in store must be looked for on the Pacific slope, and possibly in Australia, it being as true now as it was when the first Aryans took up their march, that only the most energetic and vigorous have enterprise enough to leave their homes.

It would be interesting to examine, in turn, each of these out-growths of civilization, and mark its separate development; but time will not permit, and on this occasion I shall confine myself to one. Let us then now take up the question originally proposed. Does the same law of continuity and progress which we have seen to hold good in astronomy, in geology, in vegetable and animal life, in the history of man in general, and of the white race in particular—does this same law obtain in the history of literature?

Before examining this question, however, let us glance for a single moment at the history and development of Language, the body of which Literature is the soul. In the science of language, the researches of our time are laying bare the most suggestive and unlooked-for facts; no less than that all known languages may be stratified in the order of their development, from the monosyllabic or rudimentary, of which the Chinese is a surviving monument, through the agglutinative or Turanian, of which the Mongolian tongues are specimens, up to the inflected or those having affixes and suffixes, of which all the Indo-European dialects, including our own, are examples. By the study of the Sanskrit, every step in this development may be traced, and the progress of linguistic research makes it now not improbable that when they were in their monosyllabic stage, the Semitic tongues—that is, the Hebrew, Arabic, etc.—were identical with the primitive form of the Indo-European languages themselves. In a word, it results from the researches of Bopp and the modern school, that language tends to undergo, and in the case of the Indo-Germanic languages, that it has undergone, a regular and natural development, every step of which may be traced. It is much the same with the numerals. We can follow them to their source, and prove that the Arabic figures 1, 2, 3, &c., the corresponding Roman numerals I, II, III, &c., and those of all other nations, have been invented by the wit of man.

So much for the shell, the envelope; let us now return to the substance of Literature, which in its largest sense means the written expression of the thoughts of man. There are other expressions of human thought, such as Architecture, Painting, Music and Sculpture, all of which are subjected to the law of continuity, development and progress, though in the case of sculpture there has been little or no progress since the age of Pericles. But this by the way. Let us return to Literature. All the books that ever were written (except catalogues and other bibliographical works) may be divided into five classes: Theology, Jurisprudence, Sciences and Arts, Belles-Lettres and History. But on the present occasion I shall pass by Theology, Jurisprudence, Sciences and Arts, and History, and speak of Literature proper or Belles-Lettres, of which Poetry is the highest type. The question is, Does the history of pure Literature or Belles-Lettres show continuity, progress and development?

There are not wanting those who deny this; admitting the continuity, they deny the progress. They tell you that the difference between the literature of ancient Greece, for example, and that of modern nations, is that the one is original and the other merely imitative. It cannot be denied that there is a grain of truth in this assertion, but in the sweeping and unqualified way in which it is made by Muir and other writers on Greek literature, it is entirely false.

In the first place, it must not be supposed that the earliest Greek writers whose works have come down to us were the first in the field. Nature does nothing by great leaps. There were brave men before Agamemnon, and before Homer there were other Greek poets; a catalogue of their names and their works has come down to us. The poems of both Homer and Hesiod rest on an older groundwork; and there was more than one national literature before that of Greece. Solomon's Song is perfect in its way, and the papyri found in Egyptian tombs contain novels as well as fragments of the Book of the Dead. Æschylus confesses his obligation to a Libyan legend in the famous passage:—

An eagle once—so Libyan legends say—
Struck to the heart, on earth expiring lay,
And gazing on the shaft that winged the blow,
Thus spake: “Whilst others’ ills from others flow,
To my own plumes, alas! my fate I owe.”

This fable, by the way, has been borrowed by La Fontaine; and Waller, and after him Byron, have repeated it without acknowledgment. If we knew all, the claims of the Greeks themselves to perfect originality might be seriously impaired. Still, so far as the Greeks were the first to describe the phenomena of external nature, the actions and passions of men, they were, to a great extent, original. The Greek poets appear to have written down whatever struck them as just and impressive, without fear of being accused of stealing from a predecessor; and if we speak of the same things, we must needs in some sort, follow them, that is, if we describe truly. It is the same with criticism, of which Aristotle's *Art of Poetry* is the best-esteemed piece among the ancients. How came he to excel Horace, and Boileau, and Pope, who were better poets, and who had also the advantage of studying him before they wrote? Because they only copied him, but he had copied nature.

Homer, telling of the march of an army, says: "The firm earth groaned beneath the steeds and armed men." Napier, in his *Peninsular War*—doubtless unconsciously—says the same thing in almost the same words; it is the natural thing to say. Still the poet who follows Homer, and who must often describe the same things as Homer describes, may place an idea in a clearer light and present it in a neater form of expression than his predecessors; and this has often been done. For example, Homer says:

Aurora now was rising up the steep
Of high Olympus, to the immortal gods
Pure light diffusing.

This is a simple personification of the dawn. Compare with it Shakespeare's more exquisite description of a sunrise:

Look! love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;
Night's candles are burnt out; and jocund Day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.

I may remark in passing that this charming picture of the gentle and gradual dawning of natural light is a true illustration of the historical development of the light of knowledge.

What more natural dissuasive from suicide to be addressed to a martial people than that quoted by Cicero from a Greek writer?—

Vetatque Pythagoras, injussu imperatoris, id est Dei, de præsidio et statione vitæ discedere. That is to say, "Pythagoras forbids us to quit our post or station of life without the orders of the commander (that is God) who gave it us." But Spenser, in the *Faëry Queen*, has placed the same thought in a more striking light:—

For he who doth appoint the sentinel his roome
Will license him depart at sound of morning droome.

Here the words "sentinel" and "at sound of morning drum" bring before the mind the picture of the guard wearily pacing his round and longing for the relief which will certainly come with the dawn.

I do not wish to detract from the exquisite beauty of many of Homer's comparisons and generally of his descriptions of external things—in these he has seldom been surpassed save by Dante and Shakespeare—but in his delineation of the emotions of the soul, Homer is inferior to hundreds of poets who have succeeded him. Grand as are the ring and majesty of rhythm in the *Iliad*, and noble as are the largeness and naturalness of expression—things that are characteristic of a growing people, it must be confessed—with all deference to the English critics with whom, for one hundred and fifty years, it has been the fashion to extol Homer as the greatest poet the world has ever produced, it must be confessed that there is a certain barbarism which reflects the times in which the poems attributed to Homer were collected. The poetry is mainly the poetry of martial life: it sings of clashing shields, of wounds and gore—of the artificial gods of a gifted but baby nation. You look in vain in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* for any of that apprehension of the puzzling problems of life which, five hundred years later, characterized to some extent the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, and which lends such solemn interest to the book of Job—for any expression of the inner thought of the age, such as in our time breathes through the verses of Tennyson. Accordingly the advice of Sir William Temple must be taken with some grains of allowance. He says:

Read Homer once and you can read no more;
For all books else appear so mean, so poor,
Verse will seem prose; but still persist to read,
And Homer will be all the books you need.

For my part, I want a few more, such as the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, and *Pilgrim's Progress*, to say nothing of the *Saturday Review* and *Lippincott's Magazine*.

The fact is, there was no reach of thought nor fineness of sensibility among the early Greeks, because reflection had not yet wakened the deeper sympathies of their nature; and we are perpetually shocked with the imperfections of their morality and the coarseness of their affections, because society had not yet subsisted long enough in peace and security to develop those finer sources of emotion. The extreme grossness and ribaldry of Aristophanes are apt to excite our wonder when we first consider him as the contemporary of Euripides, Socrates, and Plato; but the truth is, that the Athenians, after all, were but a rude populace as to moral delicacy and social refinement.

And even in their philosophy, which it is the correct thing to praise, one must search through bushels of chaff to get one grain of wheat. Plato has some beautiful and a few sublime thoughts, but he abounds in trifling disquisitions and foolish notions; and many of his propositions are so absurd that a schoolboy can see their worthlessness. Plato tells us, for example, in the *Timæus*, that all things are made out of the four elements—earth, air, fire and water, and moreover that three of these elements are composed of scalene triangles and the fourth of isosceles triangles. The originality of Plato has been exaggerated; and Gladisch has recently shown that his mind was but the intellectual stomach in which was imperfectly digested the crude mental food coming from the Persian, the Indian, the Chinese, the Egyptian and the Jewish schools of thought. This, however, may be said in favor of Greek philosophy, that it carried the *a priori* method of investigation as far as it was possible to carry it. Modern metaphysical writers merely reproduce the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, Plotinus, and the rest. What we have found out, however, is a *novum organum*, a new and fruitful Method—that of induction. It was by pursuing the unscientific method of the ancients, and referring everything to final causes, that one Greek philosopher arrived at the notable conclusion that the shape of the soul is spherical, because a sphere is the most perfect shape; and another added

three planets to the seven which had already been discovered, because ten is the perfect number.

The exaggerated praise which has been given to Greek literature by English pedants, who naturally exalt that to the study of which their lives have been devoted, is out of place in this country, where we dare think for ourselves, where a new and productive land, free institutions, an energetic race (the flower of the Old World), together with grand industrial and political achievements, conspire to make Americans believe in Progress—in the present and the future rather than in the past. A man is not considered educated here whose knowledge consists alone of

The languages, especially the dead;
The sciences, especially the abstruse;
The arts—at least all such as can be said
To be the most remote from common use.

On the other hand, a total neglect of the classics is equally to be avoided if American scholarship is to be worth anything. The knowledge of Greek and Latin is the very foundation of all culture, and is essential for every one who wishes to use his own language with precision; while the study of the Greek poets is the shortest road to enlarged and liberal thought.

Most true it is that Greek literature laid the foundation; but it is no less certain that Latin, Italian, French, German, and, above all, English literature (the noblest of them all), have built upon that foundation. The seventeenth century saw the birth of an epic as much grander than the *Iliad* as the loss of Paradise is superior in importance to the fall of Troy.

Of Peleus' son, Achilles, sing, O Muse,
The vengeance deep and deadly; whence to Greece
Unnumbered ills arose; which many a soul
Of mighty warriors to the viewless shades
Untimely sent; they on the battle-plain
Unburied lay, a prey to ravening dogs
And carrion birds.

Such is Homer's subject. Turn now to Milton's:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man

Restore us, and regain the blissful scat,
Sing heavenly muse!

What in me is dark
I lumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert eternal Providence
And justify the ways of God to man.

In the narrow field open to Hömer's view, he put forth an effort of creative power which is perfect of its kind; but it does not satisfy the modern mind, accustomed to a wider horizon, and content with nothing less than the epic of the universe.

Again, *Hamlet* is a nobler tragedy than *Prometheus Bound*, and the *School for Scandal* a more exquisite as well as a more moral comedy than the *Thesmophoriazusæ* of Aristophanes. In the *Medea* of Euripides, the sorceress is a fury who murders her children without apparent provocation; in those of Legouvé and Grillparzer this artistic defect is supplied, and the latter contains one scene—that in which Creusa teaches Medea a song, and the husband refuses to listen—more touching than any in the Greek tragedy. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is no more to be compared with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* than Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* is to Cuvier's *Règne Animal*.

Having combated what I consider the false idea continually thrown out by Oxford and Cambridge scholars, that all modern literature is but a mere imitation of that of the Greeks, let us take a cursory glance at the subsequent course of that expression of human thought which we find in books.

Latin literature is notoriously an outgrowth from that of Greece. It is a curious fact that, with all their organizing ability, their legislative capacity and their genius for arms, the Romans possessed nothing but a meagre ballad literature until they imported the humanities from Greece. With the exception of so much as relates to the art of government the Roman authors from first to last were essentially imitative. But their literature was marked by a real development. In the first place—and this is very remarkable—the Romans, contrary to the custom of all other nations, began their career of letters with philosophy. But while they borrowed their philosophy from the Greeks, they

made much more use of it than their masters. The philosophical writings of Cicero, for example, though occasionally encumbered with the subtleties of his Athenian preceptors, contain a much more complete code of morality than is to be found in all the volumes of the Greeks. It is only necessary, however, to compare Tully's *Offices* with Dymond's *Principles of Morality* to see the advance in the science of ethics which time and Christianity have since brought about.

The usurpation of Augustus gave quite a different character to the literary genius of Rome, and brought it back to those poetical studies with which most other nations have begun. The poetry of the Romans, however, derived this advantage from the lateness of its origin—that it was enriched by all that knowledge of the human heart and those habits of reflection which had been generated by the previous study of philosophy.

The atrocious tyranny which darkened the earlier ages of the Empire gave rise to the third school of Roman literature. Much more profound views of human nature and a far greater moral sensibility characterize this age; and show that even the unspeakable degradation to which the abuse of power had then sunk the mistress of the world could not arrest altogether that intellectual progress which gathers its treasures from all the varieties of human fortune. Seneca, Tacitus, Epictetus, Quintilian and the two Plinys afford evidence of this progress, for they are, and especially the three latter, in point of thought, accuracy, and profound sense, conspicuously superior to any writers upon similar subjects in the days of Augustus.

Hitherto we have had to do only with Pagan literature. In Dante and the Italian school we recognize the influence of Christianity, and also the refining effect of that chivalrous respect for woman for which Southern Europe was mainly indebted to its conquest by the Germanic tribes. Christianity, by infusing what had never before been felt—a serious and solemn conviction of the immortality of the soul and of a future state of retribution—turned men's thoughts away from those earthly glories which had called forth the enthusiasm of the Greeks. The respectful and romantic feeling toward woman which characterized the so-called Northern barbarians, and which they inherited with their pure

Aryan blood, had two effects upon the Italian mind. In the baser sort it helped to bring about the worship of the Blessed Virgin, while in those in whose blood was more largely infused the healthy Germanic element, it gave to the passion of love a tender and delicate expression, which, as it shows itself in the poets, was unprecedented in literature. In the works of Daunte both these influences are strikingly manifest; the legitimate dread of future punishment which Christianity inspires showing itself in an exaggerated and terrible but still glorious form in the *Divina Commedia*, while the inspiring influences of a pure and romantic love disclose themselves in the *Vita Nuova*. As regards the latter, what can be more unlike the coarse pagan love of Homer, or the joyful, thoughtless, sensual love of Tibullus and Anacreon, than the delicate, tender, mournful, troubled passion of Dante for Beatrice? Look at her picture as her poet-lover drew it:

So kind, so full of gentle courtesy
 My lady's greeting is, that every tongue
 To silence thrills, and eyes that on her hung
 With mute observance dare no more to see.
 Onward she moves, clothed with humility—
 Hearing with look benign, her praises rung :
 A being seeming sent from heaven among
 Mankind, to show what heavenly wonders be.
 In all she does such courtly gentleness—
 None can recall her worth without a sigh
 Of love, oppressed with that sweet memory.

Dante's passion expands his soul into boundless love. "When-ever and where-ever," he says, "Beatrice appeared to me I no longer felt that I had an enemy in the world—such a flame of charity was kindled in my heart, causing me to forgive every one who had offended me." Mazzini has well said, that "in his love for the beautiful, in his strivings after inward purity, Beatrice was the muse of his understanding, the angel of his soul, the consoling spirit which sustained him in exile, poverty and despair."

Dante is the poet of sorrow and suffering. The acuteness with which he felt the ingratitude of his countrymen betrays itself in the anecdote of him which the German poet Geibel has repeated in verses recently translated by a townswoman of our own:

Through the streets of fair Verona once alone great Dante went,
 When the bard of Florence wandered from his land in banishment:
 And it chanced a little maiden, as he passed, the poet spied;
 And she spake thus to her sister who was sitting by her side:
 "Sister, look, there goes that Dante who descended into hell:
 On his dusky brow are written gloom and horror—mark him well!
 In that city of the torments he has seen such anguish sore
 That an inward terror holds him, and he smileth nevermore."
 Dante heard and turned toward her—from his lips these accents fell:
 "To forget the trick of smiling I need no descent to hell.
 All the suffering I depicted—every torment, every wound—
 Here upon this earth already, ay, in Florence I have found."

It is in the *Divina Commedia* that we find the touching lines which inspired Ary Scheffer and other artists, and which Tennyson refers to when he says—

..... This is truth the poet sings,
 That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.

Nessun maggior dolore
 Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
 Nella miseria.

It is only of late years that the genius of Dante, always recognized by the Italians, has been properly appreciated by the Germans and the English. It is now dawning upon our minds that this sombre, awful and fierce embodiment of the Middle Ages is also the greatest of all poets, Shakespeare alone excepted. He built upon the foundations laid by Greece and Rome, expressly acknowledging his debt to Virgil; but the superstructure was the work of his own consummate genius, which, like genius at all periods, was fully alive to the influences of his age.

We have not time to do more than refer to the services rendered to literature by those other great Italians—Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Tasso; and passing over also the French poets, who were mostly close imitators of the models of Greece and Rome, the next great name in pure literature is that of Shakespeare, whose works form a striking proof that the law of continuity, development and progress includes Letters within its scope. Shakespeare followed the literary traditions in this—that his plays were based upon plots made ready to his hand by the romances current in his day, and especially Bandello's *Novels*, or

upon the facts of history as he found them in such books as Plutarch's *Lives* and Hollinshed's *Chronicles*. From the latter he copied whole speeches, with a slight improvement of the form of expression. He made good use of his "small Latin and less Greek," and the original ideas of many of his most beautiful passages have been traced to the Latin and Italian poets. But he touched nothing that he did not adorn; and if he sometimes imitated others he was himself inimitable. It is said, for example, that in Shakespeare's time there was inscribed in large letters over the Globe Theatre in London this phrase of Petronius: *Quod fere totus mundus exerceat histrionem*—All the world acts the player's part. This was the germ: for ages it had enjoyed, as it were, only an inferior and rudimentary life, until its development in the matchless soil of Shakespeare's mind:—

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages;

and so on with the celebrated description, familiar to every one who hears me.

Take another example: Virgil, in curious accordance with rabbinical ideas, which Dante and Milton also followed, speaking of the infernal regions, says:

And some are hung to bleach upon the wind,
Some plunged in waters, others purged in fires,
Till all the dregs are drained and all the rust expires.

And see what the idea becomes when the master artist puts his hand to the work:

Ay; but to die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible, warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbèd ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence about
The pendent world.

But although Shakespeare served himself all he could by read-

ing, so that in his own time he was called an upstart crow beautified with the feathers of his neighbors, his works abound with original illustrations drawn at first hand from nature; as when he says:

A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
In the bottom of a cowslip.

His greater conceptions were drawn directly from his own feelings and observation. He has contributed to our stock of household words three times as many phrases as any other author; and in a recent collection of familiar quotations one-fourth of the volume is occupied by passages from his works. He was by no means one of those bankers so common in literature, who are rich with the aggregated fortunes of individuals, and who would be ruined if they were too heavily drawn on.

One of the many excellences of the myriad-minded Shakespeare's genius was his unrivalled command of language. Unlike Johnson, who always used a long word when a short one would do as well, or the translators of the Bible, who never used a word from the Latin or Greek when they could get hold of as good a one from the Anglo-Saxon, Shakespeare always used the word which best expressed his meaning, long or short. For instance, his phrase "the multitudinous seas incarnadine" is Latin, and the sound answers to the sense, as in the *πολύφλοις βόοι θάλασσης* of Homer; but, he takes care to add in the vernacular—"making the green one red." In the address of Suffolk to Queen Margaret note how in the following lines almost every word is Saxon until we come to the last:

For where thou art, there is the world itself,
With every several pleasure in the world,
And where thou art not, DESOLATION.

Richard Grant White has thrown out the idea that there is no good reason why we should not have, at any time when there is a favorable conjuncture of circumstances, another poet even greater than Shakespeare. And certainly the wonderful advance of science in our day, our national progress, and the exaltation of mind caused by our late civil war, make the United States of our time not unlike the England of Queen Elizabeth and her immediate successors, whose age was that of Shakespeare and



0 029 895 731 0

24

Bacon and Milton. Who knows but that some subtle atmospheric influence was concerned in the successive appearance of the clusters of great writers who illustrated the age of Pericles, that of Augustus, and that of Elizabeth? And who can tell when the cycle may not come round again?

Of the last great literary age, next in the roll of deathless poets after that of Shakespeare himself, comes the great name of Milton; but I believe that America is yet destined, and perhaps ere long, to give to the world an epic as much grander than Milton's as our insight into the plans of the Creator is greater than was his. The machinery of the *Paradise Lost* was constructed of a lie: its scenery represented the thing that was not—a solid heaven, a flat-expanded earth, and under all a hell peopled with intellectual demons, where—

High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus or of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Shows on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat.

The coming man will tell us of the great soul-satisfying revelations made by Science of the *real* history of the universe—he will tell of the majestic progress of ideas—and in prophetic vision, standing on the shoulders of the generations of the past, he will see and point us to the Promised Land. He will sing that the Creation is not yet finished; that as the ammonite and trilobite have given place to man, so man himself shall be succeeded by other forms more beautiful, other souls more elevated, other beings more and yet more like God.

MAY 27. 1870.